



Recreation and Public Space for Healing and Social Change

Results of Photovoice

What is the impact on community health when residents have public and recreational spaces that encourage healing and social change? This theme was identified through photovoice narratives that named spaces in our community such as the Big Four Bridge, youth camps, and parks. These places are considered welcoming for residents, allowing them to feel safe, comfortable and relaxed. For many residents, they felt invested in and found meaning while engaging in activities in these places. Additionally, many named these public and recreational spaces as avenues for healing and social change through their ability to bring communities from all walks of life together.

History of Recreation and Public Space

Recreation and Public Spaces are intrinsically linked to place, power, wealth, history and politics. Which spaces are set aside and for whom often reflects the values and priorities of society.

Planned parks originate from private residential squares reserved for monarchy and the elite. Leisure was limited to those of upper class standing. Afterwards, public parks were intended used as public health medicine to cure the ills of society, offering culturally acceptable activities and calm, civil places.¹ This continued in the 19th century, when large public spaces were designed to communicate ideas of cleanliness and morality that reinforced a “refined” social value system.² During the world fair in Chicago in 1893, a new park was created to provide a utopian experience away from poverty and crime called “The White City.”³ In the 20th century, as populations and park users became more diverse, parks had behavioral rules and dress codes to reinforce elite norms with working-class and immigrant visitors. After Civil War Reconstruction, segregation created ‘separate but equal’ facilities. Parks created for African Americans were often smaller and had fewer facilities than those for Whites.¹ Community facilities, such as pools, schools, and libraries were also segregated.

A result of post-WWII suburbanization was the loss of many natural areas at the edges of cities as they developed into housing. A secondary consequence was the inadvertent decay of inner city parks as they were left behind. The lack of continuing investment to maintain urban public spaces left many communities of color with a lack of recreational opportunities and the development of distinct urban and suburban places over time.^{4,5}



The Importance of Space for Wellbeing

Community facilities are critical amenities that localities offer to residents. Kentucky state law requires the city to have a plan for ensuring quality and accessible community facilities.⁶ Services provided by community facilities improve residents' quality of life, protecting the physical safety of individuals as well as providing other opportunities such as physical activity, education, and community gathering spaces.

For all ages, participating in leisure activities are directly linked to wellbeing. For children, play promotes creativity, "self-confidence, self-efficacy, as well as physical, social, cognitive and emotional strength and skills."⁷ In adults, leisure promotes stress relief, prevents chronic disease, sustains cognition and physical abilities and provides opportunities for social interaction.^{8,9}

It is essential for public policy to support opportunities for residents to engage in:¹⁰

- Social interaction
- Sense of belonging to the community
- Skill development
- Self-determination
- Stress Relief
- Physical activity

Strategies for Healing and Social Change

Many cities and organizations provide community centers that serve the community. Centers should provide activities and services that meet the specific needs of community residents.

New strategies are incorporating an intentional focus on healing and social justice. This helps youth shift their focus from blaming themselves for problems in their community and helps them develop skills in examining the root causes of their personal and/or community problems.¹¹ Youth are given the space to explore real issues and empowered through developing hope and creating positive change around things they care about.¹²

Key Terms

Leisure - a state of being free, in a state of rest and relaxation, or an attitude, usually pleasurable.

Recreation - activity through which leisure may be experienced and enjoyed.

Open Space – a broad term for land that is set aside, typically used for landscaping, recreation or public uses. Can also be privately owned.

Green Space – land that is specifically set aside for natural landscaping.

Public Space – land that is specifically set aside for public uses such as parks, walking paths, or art. Not privately owned.

Greenways – green space that is set aside through planned development. Provides natural areas in between development. Often includes stream or storm water mitigation.

Youth Camps – operated for youth under 18 years old, (sometimes with overnight stay) for recreational, educational or vacation purposes.

Community Facilities – buildings or other spaces dedicated to public use and/or services, such as community centers, schools, playgrounds, pools, public art, libraries, utilities and public safety agencies.



Innovating Public Spaces

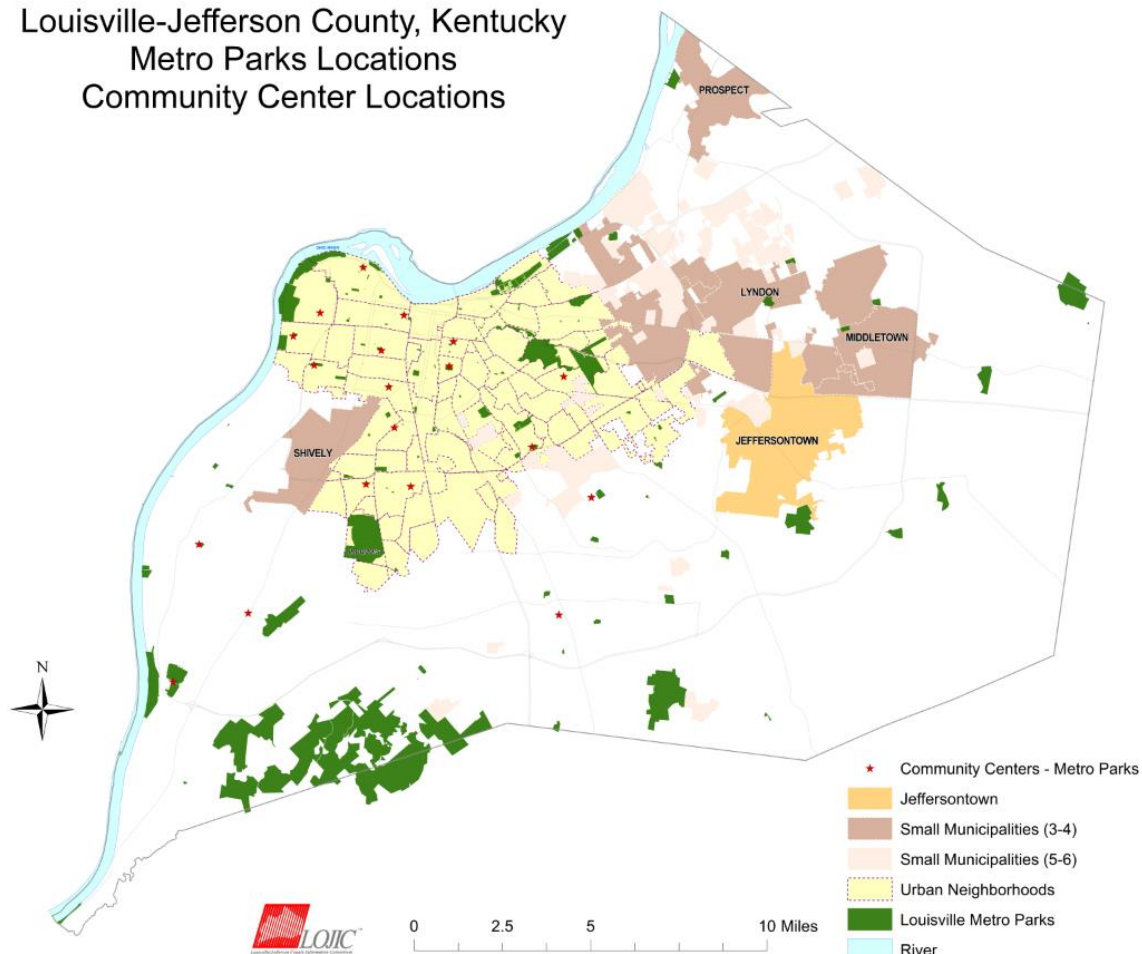
The city of **Minneapolis** is working with community residents to create new criteria for prioritizing park updates. The new 20-Year Neighborhood Park uses a scale with factors such as whether the park is located in a racially concentrated area of poverty, how big the youth population is in the area, and the condition of the park equipment. Park projects will also incorporate a Racial Equity Tool, which helps officials understand how their decisions specifically affect communities of color.¹³



Additionally, local organizing efforts led to the creation of the “Legacy Council”, which advises on programming, art, and equipment that both fit community desires and remembers Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The council also developed a playground designed as a tribute to African American thinkers, inventors, and leaders.¹⁴

Currently, the Louisville Metro Department of Parks and Recreation maintains parks across Jefferson County and operates 13 community centers.

Louisville-Jefferson County, Kentucky
Metro Parks Locations
Community Center Locations



Current Plans

Louisville has several long term plans that guide the development and upkeep of public spaces. Below are relevant main policy goals each plan. Each goal has specific objectives and policies to support its completion.

Cornerstone 2020 (Louisville Metro Comprehensive Plan)

See the full plan at:

https://louisvilleky.gov/sites/default/files/planning_design/general/cornerstone_2020_comprehensive_plan.pdf

- Public Open Space and Parks
 - Provide a system of well-maintained parks and recreational facilities which meets the needs of the residents.
 - Form a network of open spaces and greenway corridors.
 - Provide open space for aesthetic, cultural, and educational purposes.
 - Incorporate land needed to protect public health and safety.
- Bicycling:
 - Integrate bicycle and pedestrian facilities into transportation programs.
 - Promote the safety and use of bicycle and pedestrian facilities as both a means of transportation and a form of recreation.
- Environment:
 - Quality air, water, and natural landscape protection.
 - Consider environmental and quality of life impacts as part of the development decision-making process.
 - Protect the Ohio River Waterfront and Jefferson Memorial Forest and develop for improved public use.
- Quality of Life
 - Provide adequate civic, cultural, recreational, educational, and medical community facilities to serve all of Jefferson County.
 - Make public art accessible to all citizens of Jefferson County.

Louisville Metro Parks and Open Space Master Plan

See the full plan at:

<https://louisvilleky.gov/government/parks/parks-and-open-space-master-plan>

- Create an interconnected, comprehensive system of parks, open space and greenways throughout Jefferson County.
- Develop a county “loop” (Louisville Loop).
- Parks and open space define the environmental framework for all future development.
- Each park will be designed to fulfill as many recreational, cultural, and educational uses as possible, while also protecting the natural environment.



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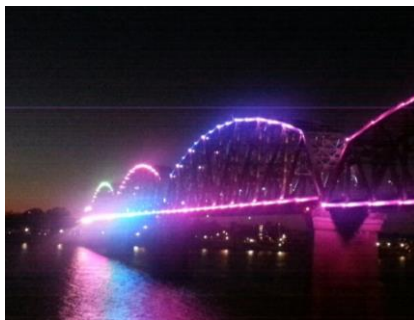
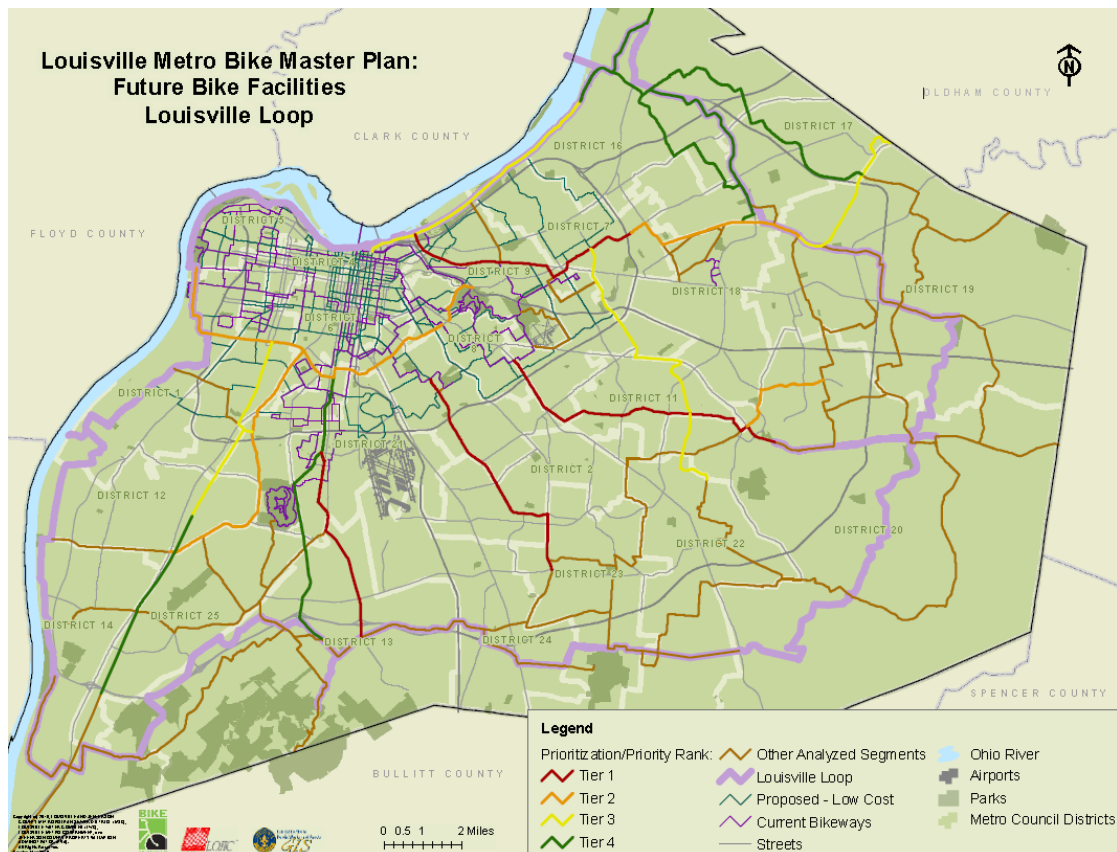
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Louisville Bike Master Plan

See the full plan at:

<https://louisvilleky.gov/node/106426/>

- Increase bicycling activity throughout all parts of Louisville by making it a fun, comfortable and accessible mode of travel between 2010 and 2030.
- Reduce the number of cyclists killed and injured in crashes with motor vehicles.



Spotlight: The Big Four Bridge

Open 24/7, the new Big Four Bridge at the Waterfront (River Road) is a prime example of public space that connects people and places. Every day people from all over the city enjoy walking on the bridge. Originally built as a railroad bridge in 1895, closed in the 1960s, it reopened in to the public as a pedestrian bridge in February 2013.



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What Influences Public Space?

Key Policy Terms

- **Comprehensive Plan** – The state required document for that guides land use and development for the entire city. The city makes a new plan every 20 years. Louisville is in the process of updating its current plan (Cornerstone 2020) and making the next plan.
- **Zoning** – Local laws that dictate how land can be used. These are based off of the guidelines in the Comprehensive Plan and continually updated by the local zoning board. There is a map showing how all land in Jefferson County is zoned.¹⁴
- **Land Development Code** – The document that holds all zoning laws and related requirements for developments (size, setback, green space, parking, etc.).
- **Parks Master Plan** – A long term plan that provides a roadmap of how and when parks will be improved and/or developed, also what land may be acquired and converted to public use.
- **Infrastructure** – Things like sidewalks, green space, roads, water management systems, and other improvements to the built environment that supports development. Often public dollars fund projects; however private investors may be required to make improvements as part of a development project.
- **City-led investment** – Where/what local jurisdictions choose to spend its dollars.
- **MSD** – The Metropolitan Sewer District, the agency that manages water mitigation for Jefferson County. MSD creates policy, installs and updates infrastructure, and does education/programming for residents.
- **Metro Parks and Recreation Advisory Board** – A volunteer committee comprised of community members that advise Metro Parks on park development and planning and encourage park advocacy around the city.
- **Louisville and Jefferson County Environmental Land Trust** - protects land for future generations through voluntary cooperative programs to preserve natural areas. It also promotes stewardship of natural and cultural resources, both public and private.
- **Community participation** – mechanisms for residents to have a say in the types of facilities, services, and programming they want in their community. Full participation should include a community needs assessment, analysis of preferences, , and community say in priority setting and other decision making processes.

External Forces

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| - Economic development* | - Nonprofit Organizations* |
| - Neighborhood Quality* | - Foundations* |
| - Natural environment | - Land Trusts* |

**Can be influenced by Policy/Incentives*



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Want to get more involved?

Americana Community Center: <http://americanacc.org/>

Association of Community Ministries: <http://www.louisvilleministries.org/>

Greater Louisville Sierra Club: <http://www.louisvillesierraclub.org/>

Jewish Community Center: <https://jewishlouisville.org>

Louisville Central Community Centers: <http://www.lcccnews.org/>

Louisville Hiking Club: www.meetup.com/LouisvilleHikingClub

Louisville Urban League: <http://www.lul.org/>

Metro United Way (leisure activities resource page):

<http://www.referweb.net/Metro/Subcategory.aspx?;;0;;N;0;270893;Individual and Family Life;Leisure Activities;424>

Outdoor Afro Louisville: <https://www.meetup.com/Outdoor-Afro-Louisville/>

Olmstead Park Conservancy <http://www.olmstedparks.org/>

YMCA of Greater Louisville: <http://www.ymcalouisville.org/index.html>

Youth Violence Prevention Research Center: <http://louisville.edu/sphis>

Need more information?

Brightside <https://louisvilleky.gov/government/brightside>

Louisville Metro Department of Parks and Recreation

<https://louisvilleky.gov/government/parks>

Kentucky State Parks <http://parks.ky.gov/>

National Parks Service <https://www.nps.gov>

Waterfront Development Corporation <http://louisvillewaterfront.com/>



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- ¹ Byrne, J. & Wolch, J. (2009). Nature, race, and parks: past research and future directions for geographic research. *Progress in Human Geography*. 33(6) pp. 743–765.
- ² Oklahoma Historical Society. (2009) *City Beautiful Movement*. Accessible at: <http://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=CI007>
- ³ Blumberg, N. (2015) *City Beautiful Movement*. Accessible at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/City-Beautiful-movement>
- ⁴ Danaher, K., et. al. (2007) *Building the Green Economy: Success stories from the grassroots*. Excerpt: www.alternet.org/story/65404/the_future_of_cities%3A_how_sprawl_and_racism_are_intertwined
- ⁵ Squires, G. & Kubrin, C. (2006). Privileged Places: Race, Opportunity and Uneven Development in Urban America. *National Housing Institute: No. 147 (Fall 2006)*.
- ⁶ KRS 100.187 Accessible at: <http://www.lrc.ky.gov/Statutes/statute.aspx?id=26711>
- ⁷ United Nations. (2013) Report. *UN Committee on the Rights of the Child*
- ⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2016) *Physical Activity Basics*. Accessible at: <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/index.htm>
- ⁹ Toepoel, V. (2012) Ageing, Leisure, and Social Connectedness: How could Leisure Help Reduce Social Isolation of Older People? *Soc Indic Res.*, 113. pp. 355–372
- ¹⁰ Laidler, A. & Cushman, G. (1990) *Recreation, Leisure and Social Policy*. New Zealand: Lincoln University Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism & Victoria University Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies.
- ¹¹ Brown, A. (2016, Unpublished Dissertation). *Healing Recreational Spaces of Refuge for Black Youth*.
- ¹² Kelly Pryor, B. & Outley, C. (2014) Just Spaces: Urban recreation as sites for social justice youth development. *Journal of Leisure Research*. Vol. 46, No.3, pp. 272-290
- ¹² Boarini, C. (2016) Years of inequities lead to ‘extremely rare’ racial lens applied to Minneapolis parks planning. Accessible at: <http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/years-of-inequities-lead-to-extremely-rare-racial-lens-applied-to-minneapolis-parks-planning/>
- ¹³ Kellogg, M. & Nelson, J. (2015) Racial Equity in Parks and Recreation. Accessible at: <http://www.parksandrecreation.org/2015/December/Racial-Equity-in-Parks-and-Recreation/>
- ¹⁴ <http://apps.lojic.org/lojiconline/>

